
Strategic and Institutional Approaches in Crisis Communication.

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Abstract

The management of meaning may involve a variety of stakeholders, all of whom play a part in the way an apology or a hostile attitude is presented, interpreted, and received. It depends on a strategic and institutionalist approach to see the double-edge of organizational legitimation: hostility and apology. As with all forms of management of meaning, apologies and aggressive attitudes must be seen as parts of a wider political process where different parties seek to draw in neutrals by adopting a moral high ground, where alliances are formed and dissolved and where conflicts move from one terrain to another, assuming different forms as they do so. Finally, is tied up to the management of unpredictable emotions unleashed by the earlier destabilization of meaning. Apology versus hostility, in presence and absence, is an important aspect in the emotional life of groups, organizations, and even nations.

Keywords: Institutionalist, political philosophy, hostility, micromotives and macrobehavior, apology, cooperation, excuses.

1. Introduction

Thomas Hobbes as a political philosopher shares the logic and worldview of modern social and economic science. In \textit{Leviathan} (1651) he deals with the problem of understanding the social world in economic terms

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and that makes him a modern institutionalist with rational approaches to social systems. He puts forward a theory of agency, a constructive approach, on what individual's reason depends and which are their most basic motives. This is an institutionalist argument. "Individuals are rational and self-concerned; they are strategic and they are risk-averse, in that they take steps to avoid attack by other agents". In institutional settings social action takes place: a set of laws as well as the state of nature impose individuals' actions, social and political. Individual competition in the context of the absence of sovereignty leads to perpetual violent competition and individual self-striving within the context of a system of law leads to the accumulation of property and peaceful coexistence. That argument projects the consequences of these "microfoundations" for an aggressive society. But is it necessary to live in a hostile society? Hobbes\textsuperscript{d} is offering a micro- to macro-argument based on analysis of modes of agency about a particular institutional context and it seems that, according to Hobbes, nature of human leads to pathological desires which create enemies. "If any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end tend to destroy one another".

1.1. Hobbes's Leviathan and the meaning of hostility as institutional theory

"It is a war of all against all", it is a description of Hobbes's (Leviathan, 1651) meaning of hostility in systems and organizations and he is trying to explain the behavior of social systems when passion commands blind revenge, a process internal to the system. The component parts may be institutions within the system or subgroups that are part of the system. The analysis moves to a lower level than that of the system, explaining the behavior of the system by recourse to the behavior of its parts. The way of interpretation is not uniquely quantitative or uniquely qualitative, but may be either.

So the logic of Hobbes's argument is fairly clear; and is similar to that of institutionalist rational-choice theorists. Thomas Schelling's title, "Micromotives and Macrobehavior" (1978), captures the idea in three words: descriptions of macro-level social arrangements and individual-level motivation and action.

Contemporary political scientists argue that it is possible for men and women to create non-political institutions within the context of what Hobbes calls: the state of nature. Coordination and cooperation are possible within a "state of nature"; it is possible to achieve coordination within anarchy. In institutional settings social action takes place: a set of laws as well as the state of nature impose individuals' actions, social

\textsuperscript{d} Here are some of Hobbes's premises about individual agents from chapter XIII of Leviathan:

"From this equality of ability arise the equality of hope in the attaining of our ends. And therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. And from hence it comes to pass that where an invader hath no more to fear than another man's single power, if one plant, sow, build, or possess a convenient seat, others may probably be expected to come prepared with forces united to dispossess and deprive him, not only of the fruit of his labour, but also of his life or liberty. And the invader again is in the like danger of another.

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first make men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.

The passions that incline men to peace are: fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them. And reason suggest convenient articles of peace upon which men may be drawn to agreement. And these motives and forms of behavior by individuals lead to a predictable outcome for the collectivity in the state of nature: a war of all against all".
and political. From a sociological point of view, that argument illuminates the meaning of unfriendliness or malevolence in human nature because it simply adds certain kinds of cooperation. Central coercive authority, the main reason for hostility among individuals agents, systems and social institutions does not exist any more and is replaced by the term: coordination. Groups of people can establish self-enforcing forms of cooperation that overcome free-riders and predatorial behavior. It is likely enough that Hobbes would not have been persuaded by this argument but ultimately it is an empirical question. Can individual agents coexist harmonically even at multi-hostile economic environment or is that Hobbes's perception another one illusionary image, a kind of utopia?

1.2. Cooperation versus hostility

Such empirical and theoretical refinements to a coherent model of social explanation that is full-fledged in Hobbes's work in the mid-seventeenth century explain aggregate (macro) social outcomes as the result of automatic mechanisms and actions at the level of individual actors. So, is cooperation the alternative solution to avoid hostility and organizational malevolence or not? Michael Taylor's arguments in "Community, Anarchy and Liberty" (Cambridge, 1982) are particularly convincing, that peasant communities have traditionally found ways of creating and sustaining cooperative institutions and relationships that persist without the force of law to stabilize them. Contracts backed by legal systems are not the only way of establishing coordination and cooperation among independent violent by nature, as Hobbes persists, agents. Elinor Ostrom (1990) and collaborators make similar arguments in their sociological studies of "common property resource regimes" stable patterns of cooperation maintained by voluntary enforcement rather than central legislation (Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action). Ostrom documents dozens of important historical cases where traditional communities developed different kinds of management and made strategic economic plans on fisheries, forests, water resources and other common properties without having a central state to support these patterns of cooperation and coordination.

1.3. Cooperation and apology as a central moral code in a professional organization

What is the social role of apology in Western cultures? Do apologies help restore organizational legitimacy and trust? Is the apologizing act an act restoring human and by nature hostility? If so, what kind of apologies? A “sincere” apology has long been axiomatic to operate in an organization's legitimacy. Indeed, there is an impression that apologies are rare occurrences in commercial and professional organizations and when they are expressed, there is a tendency to regard them as cosmetic exercises. Hobbes's meaning of hostility as a rational choice for a survivor is deleted as the option of cooperation and apology is existing in an organizational system. The felt regret is the absence of apology taken as denial accompanied by a strong impulse to right the wrongs or as devaluation of the moral worth of the harmed party. The restoration, however, is likely to be more symbolic than literal as the injury itself cannot be reversed. The dignity of the victim is restored by the apology; recognition that they should not have been treated in the way they have been. The moral and relational value of such apologies is described by Kathleen Gill: The apology is not a thing; it is an act that displays a certain set of beliefs, attitudes, etc. experienced by the offender. More importantly, an apology is not a mechanism for offsetting losses. The apology does not compensate for loss; it is instead a way to acknowledge the value of what was lost. (Gill, 2000, p.16). This kind of apology implicates emotions beyond feelings of remorse and regret. It involves the expression of feelings of empathy and responsibility for having crossed a moral line. If the apology is to provide what Goffman terms a “remedial exchange” (Goffman, 1971), acts of apologizing are in part cultural and in part institutionalized.
2. Politics of an apology

Crises are a danger to the executive status, damage essentially the character and such changes can influence the dealings of stakeholders with the organization. Post-crisis communication can be used to renovate the reputation and/or stop reputational damage. How stakeholders act in response to crises or to the crisis retort strategies is the field of crisis communication dominated by various cases. Crisis management needs evidence-based communication management. Evidence-based leadership for judgment making in a crisis must be supported by logical and systematical evidence from pragmatic research rather than personal predilection and instinctive experience (Rousseau, 2006). The practical research provides a set of guiding principles for how crisis managers can utilize crisis response strategies to defend a reputation from the negative effects of a crisis.

As individuals are rational, self-concerned, strategic and risk-averse, in that they take steps to avoid attack by other agents, an apology appears a cultural preference to qualify greater sincerity (as a positive aspect) to those whom we think to feel in private what they emotionally demonstrate. Apologizing is a relational performance, part of a political process with diverse stakeholder interests (Cunningham, 1999). The authority and status of the wrongdoers and their victims deals with any previous “convictions”. Accordingly, their talk and corporal gestures reveal, in short, feelings and actions which appear to be reliable and reasonable or decrease communicative differences between people (Fineman, 2003).

In sum, apologies are parts and attempts to deal with meaning in situations where conservative meaning structures have been disrupted of the moral construction of organizations. High-profile organizational apologies offer no assurance that damaging and discreditable acts will not be repetitive or that the offended will someway instantly feel all is forgiven. But, at best, they can reinstate self-respect to the wronged parties and a level of confidence among other organizational stakeholders. At worst, apologies can appear appealing and functional in the organization and its legality. The “correct” apology is a crucial first factor in the victim's valuation progression. Action that builds significantly and/or symbolically on the apology is compulsory too.

2.1. Example

A. In courts of law, emotional credibility rests heavily on a felon's shoulders, given the expectation that she or he may be well briefed to “show remorse” in seeking leniency in sentencing (Bagarik & Amarasekara, 2001; Cox, 1998). Any public apologizer faces the challenge of countering disbelief or cynicism. In everyday discourse, some apologies fulfill social obligations. For example, the normative force of the apology has a powerful anticipatory role in stabilizing sustaining social relationships and mitigating toxicity in organization (Frost, 2003). So I may apologize to you in case you feel offended by what I have just done or am about to do, before knowing whether or not you have, indeed, experienced offence. For example, presidents and prime ministers will issue apologies for their whole country and managing directors on behalf of their clients for their company. We also use “sorry” in circumstances where we wish to express sympathy and sorrow for another's misfortune.

B. The inability to predict the crisis time is a responsibility that seems to exist at the industry with the most recent example the one of a community of economists of London School of Economics (LSE) who made an apology to Queen Elizabeth about the crisis. In a letter signed by ten eminent economists had highlighted the lack of collective intuition (collective imagination) to predict the coming judgment because of their agnosticism on psychology and sociology history. Excessive devotion to econometric models, as they said, did not allowed to refine the horizon of the crisis. Beyond the obvious excuse, economists did not expected absolution by the Queen for their lack of responsibility. The apology did not occur naturally in any court, or
so categories indicted or penalties imposed. The life anyway taught us that the mistakes of experts had easily been forgiven and forgotten and big crimes passed away in the shadow of new problems that followed. The economists' statement was a smart strategic move in the sense that at the same time to apologize foreshadowed their lack of knowledge of sociology, history and psychology and philosophy.

3. Strategies of repairing damaging behaviors: Management of control

Sykes and Matza (1957) describe the “neutralization” techniques employed by young delinquents to justify damaging behavior. Denial of responsibility and injury, denial of victim, condemnation of condemners and faith to higher loyalties are offered.

Hobbes, after all, said that if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only) endeavour to destroy or subdue one another. Scott and Lyman (1968) have proposed the fundamentals of a theory of “accounts” defined as a statement made by a social actor to explain hostile or untoward behavior” (p. 46). They single out two types of accounts, “justifications” and “excuses.” The actor accepts responsibility but denies that action was bad or acknowledges that the action was bad but denies responsibility justifying or neutralizing the action. Benoit (1995) have developed these ideas to provided extensive typologies of accounts which include concessions, excuses, justifications and refusals. Similarly, Deborah Levi (1997) sees:

- Tactical apology, when a person accused of wrongdoing offers an apology that is rhetorical and strategic and not necessary heartfelt.
- Explanation apology, when a person accused of wrongdoing offers an apology that is merely a gesture that is meant to counter an accusation of wrongdoing. In fact, it may be used to defend the actions of the accused
- Formalistic apology, when a person accused of wrongdoing offers an apology after being admonished to do so by an authority figure, who may also be the individual who suffered the wrongdoing
- Happy ending apology, when a person accused of wrongdoing fully acknowledges responsibility for the wrongdoing and is genuinely remorseful

According to the institutionalist theory, is interesting about apologies that they leave much doubt as to the nature of the incident and as to the factors that make it regrettable. Anxiety, shame or embarrassment defines the contexts. There are unfolding threats and costs to the parties involved.

The management of such processes requires emotional and political sensitivity. Social and political settings for skillful apologetic managers, especially of the philanthropic sort, respond to desperation, sorrow and are acts unmotivated by personal gain or reward (Bolton, 2005). Paradoxically, this is problematic for organizational managers socialized to defensive liability protection. Legal and personal responsibility is the further reputation and financial image of the organization. The apologetic manager or leader is trapped in complex organizational and institutional circumstances, which make apologies:

(a) vital to the management of meaning
(b) essentially indeterminate, misty and indistinct in form and subsense.

Apologies cover a range of typologies of situations and degrees of regret and are relational ways of defusing a situation, reducing fear, increasing self-satisfaction and thus standardize meaning. The timing of an apology is vital, because some emotions, such as hurt and anger, can increase in intensity. An apology, as a non-linear process, at an early stage might have worked effectively but became insufficient later. Some negative emotions collapse, so that after a “cooling period” a modest apology or a retraction may be enough
to restore the order. The way an apology is made, the emotional and political climate in which it is expressed and the desires of different parties to prolong, escalate or manage the conflicts, are social elements under consideration.

4. Conclusion

Hobbes’s way of meaning becomes violent and aggressive by nature and individuals are only trying to go against their own nature by being polite to each other. An apology can offer a face-saving reinstallation for the parties disturbed permitting the recommencement, more or less, of business as usual, even when its authenticity is doubted. In this way, apologies can be seen as modes of management of meaning when meaning becomes violated or unstable. But synchronization according to human nature is close to the insight of creating harmonically collective institutions. So, existing theory tends to advance administration through the idea of “accounts,” plausible-sounding explanations and justifications. Suggests that whether an apology is interpreted as satisfactory for the state of affairs, as deceitful or even as an additional offense, depends significantly on expressive forces at employment. In times of managerial crises, the emotions are likely to be movable, contested, multi-actor and multi-stakeholder. Meanings are without difficulty derailed, such as by the swamping possessions of the temper, annoyance, hurt or ache of those ill-treated. Indeed, we require to observe the supposed honesty of an apologetic “account,” and any attendant action, as frail property in organizational crises.

It is worthy to figure somebody why apology is vital to systems and to explain how organizations effort to continue, protect, or restore their legality decisive, often, to their very endurance (Ashford & Gibbs, 1990). This development is most apparent when a community representation imputes malefiance or bad behavior to an organization, such as harming the environment, promoting a health damaging or unsafe product, criminal disregard, deception, or simply ineffectiveness, lack of ability or falsification (Elsbach, 2000; Massey, 2001; Suchman, 1995). It is obvious in organizations ranging from government departments (“a computer fault”), hospitals (“lack of care, misdiagnoses”), railways (“lateness, breakdowns, serious accidents”), garages (“overcharging, shoddy workmanship”), schools (“lost exam papers, violent behavior”), to chief corporations. What relates these events is an immerse (or force) in stakeholder confidence in the organization because of the ache, hurt, or offense caused straight to them or to those with whom they recognize or correspond to. Where ethical influence is a keystone of authenticity, such as in churches, social work departments, the law enforcement, or the medical profession, pressure to legitimacy can be potentially destructive to the groups’ proficient standing and self-reliance can be hard to re-establish.

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